

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 23, 2003

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As questions continue to mount about the quality of US intelligence in the days leading to our military incursion into Iraq, we write to propose a course of action that might help restore public confidence.

Since the September 11 attacks, senior Administration officials have labored to document a link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. This link was one of your own stated rationales for the US invasion, and clearly the most emotionally charged justification in the eyes of many Americans. The evidence offered most often in support of such a link relates to intelligence about a secret meeting in Prague between Mohamed Atta, one of the September 11 terrorists, and Ahmed al-Ani, a senior Iraqi espionage agent.

In the days following the attacks, and over the year-and-a-half since, the White House and its advisors have repeatedly stressed the significance of the Prague meeting. Richard Perle, a member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, has written extensively on Iraq's "well-documented" collaboration with terrorists, with specific reference to "convincing" evidence of a meeting. Both Vice President Cheney and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice have defended the credibility of this intelligence.

We are, however, aware of no occasion on which US officials have produced evidence to substantiate this allegation; and many others have expressed doubt. The Czech government itself has offered different interpretations about whether or when the meeting occurred. Some have theorized it might have been a case of mistaken identity: that Atta apparently resembled a used-car dealer who knew al-Ani, and that there were actually two individuals named al-Ani.

No such evidence was included in Secretary of State Powell's presentation to the United Nations. And officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have expressed lingering doubt about whether Atta was even in Prague at the time in question. In particular, the absence of any physical evidence, such as airline or passport records, reportedly led the FBI case agent to conclude the meeting was unlikely.

With the recent apprehension in Iraq of al-Ani, we now have an opportunity to help resolve at least this piece of the puzzle. We implore you to embrace it. We presume the interrogation of al-Ani has been rigorous, with potential to yield significant new insights, and urge you and your senior staff to make public the results of the al-Ani interview. At stake is nothing less than one of the explicit rationales for committing American troops to war.

The alternative – to allow this confusion to fester – has even more ominous ramifications, as British Prime Minister Tony Blair can attest. The latest polls suggest that barely a third of British voters believe their Prime Minister to be truthful in the context of the Iraq war. Far more serious than any particular disagreement on policy or politics, the United States can ill afford such a crisis of fundamental confidence in our political leadership at this critical moment in our history.

As with the State of the Union assertions and widespread skepticism about the existence of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, the urgent need for transparency in dissecting possible Iraq-al Qaeda ties is exacerbated by the dissonance between professional investigators and political operatives within the Administration. The inference is inevitable that intelligence information was manipulated to help justify a predetermined conclusion.

In this light, reports that Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz summoned FBI agents tracking Atta's activities to persuade them that the Prague meeting was "possible" are hardly reassuring. Nor were news accounts quoting Mr. Perle as agreeing that al-Ani could be an important source, but that "a lot depends on who is doing the interrogating" because he would expect the CIA to play down evidence of the Prague meeting. In response, a CIA official was quoted as retorting that "he's just shopping for an interrogator who will cook the books to his liking."

We know you require thorough, balanced and accurate intelligence on which to base your own judgments, and to inform public understanding. Instead, the public domain has been awash with inconsistent and possibly misleading accounts about the al-Ani matter. As if to rub salt in this wound, the staggering financial consequences of the decisions which followed – to attack and then rebuild Iraq – are only now becoming clear.

Before the war, we were among those who asked for projections of the possible cost of invasion and subsequent reconstruction. None were forthcoming – either to the Congress or to the American people. After the war, Administration officials estimated a monthly price of \$2 billion; but those figures and their impact on the federal deficit have now more than doubled. However we may view the merits of these questions, our bedrock concern is for the essential credibility of our foreign policy among fellow Americans.

As you know, we have joined others in calling for independent commissions or select congressional committees to review these issues. However, we write today to suggest that there is no need to wait for others to undertake these investigations. The White

House can take immediate, affirmative and reparative steps by coming completely clean with what has been learned from the al-Ani interrogations.

Specifically, we seek clarification, based on US assessment of al-Ani's responses, to the following questions:

- 1) Did the Prague meeting between Mohammed Atta and Ahmed al-Ani actually take place? If so, what was its purpose?
- 2) Was al-Ani aware that Atta was a member of al Qaeda? Was this the first time al-Ani had met with an al Qaeda operative? If it was not, what were the other meetings?
- 3) Was al-Ani acting on orders from his superiors or on his own? If he was acting on orders from his superiors, who were they, and what was the rationale they gave for the meeting?
- 4) Were any al Qaeda operations discussed? Did they include plans for the September 11 attacks? What other targets or operations were discussed?
- 5) If plans for al Qaeda operations – particularly September 11 – were discussed, what did al-Ani do with this information?
- 6) Is there evidence of any other links between Iraqi officials and al Qaeda operatives?

Thank you in advance for your cooperation, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

  
Neil Abercrombie

  
William D. Delahunt

  
Rahm Emanuel

  
Joseph M. Hoeffel